

# Critical Issues Commentary

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## John the Baptist and Prophets to Nations

BY BOB DEWAAY

*“For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you care to accept it, he himself is Elijah, who was to come” (Matthew 11:13,14).*

*“And His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?’ And He answered and said, ‘Elijah is coming and will restore all things” (Matthew 17:10,11).*

Since the horrible events of September 11th, “prophets” are lining up to claim to either have predicted them or to have the key to God’s purposes behind them. There are many who claim to be “prophets to nations” like the Old Testament prophets. National tragedy evidently presents a great opportunity for such individuals to increase their credibility. Now further pronouncements of certain catastrophe fill the media. The real question is: are there legitimate prophets to America or any other nation who speak infallibly and authoritatively on behalf of God? In this article I will examine the last Biblical prophet to a nation, John the Baptist, and also see what the Bible says about possible future such prophets. I will show that from John the Baptist until the arrival of the two witnesses in the book of Revelation there are no prophets to nations in the mode of Old Testament prophets.

### ELIJAH WHO CAME AND IS COMING

The passages cited at the beginning of this article show that Jesus identified John the Baptist as the one predicted at the end of the book of Malachi and that “Elijah” would yet come in the future. John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah, and announced the presence of the Messianic Kingdom in the person of

Jesus Christ. He was truly a prophet to a nation since he was sent to national Israel to preach repentance in preparation for God’s presence. Malachi prophesied: “Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 3:1). The key issue is preparation for God’s presence. If God is coming then the people need to be cleansed before coming into His presence. This was John the Baptist’s role, to not only announce the imminent coming of God to His people, but to cleanse them in preparation.

In the Old Testament system of worship, cleansing was necessary for the priests to go into the tabernacle (and later temple) to perform the sacrifices and offerings prescribed in the Law. The washings did not make the priests holy, but “clean.” This meant “not defiled.” They were painfully aware of the awesomeness of God’s holiness and grave responsibility that went with going into the place of worship and His presence. The baptism of John takes its meaning from these Old Testament ideas. The people are “unclean” in the sense of not being fit to be in the presence of God to meet Him in acceptable worship. John’s baptism did not make the people “holy,” only the sacrifice that is acceptable to

God can do that. It made them clean like the washings of the Old Testament priests so that they could be ready for the acceptable sacrifice. The sacrifice that God has provided to make the people holy comes through “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29, quoting John the Baptist). John was to make the people ready for it.

John the Baptist was a prophet in the Old Testament sense and actually can be considered the last Old Testament prophet. He brought the people right to the door of the Messianic age, but he himself did not participate in it since he was killed before Messiah died to make the only perfect sacrifice that can take away sins. This is the idea shown in this passage: “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matthew 11:11). John the Baptist lived out his life under the old dispensation. He was the greatest Old Testament prophet in the sense that he personally saw the Messianic age, and witnessed the presence of Messiah. He also made the way ready for the Messiah, who was the ultimate object of all their prophecies. In Matthew 11:13 which says, “For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John,” the word “until” in the Greek signifies the last in a series.<sup>1</sup> John the Baptist was the last because the ideal hope of all the prophets was to now be realized in the person of Christ.<sup>2</sup> The least in the kingdom are greater because they actually participate in the inauguration of the Messianic age through the cross.

John the Baptist’s preaching was also in the fashion of Old Testament prophets. One unique thing about Jewish Old Testament prophets compared to those of concurrent ancient religions, is that

the Biblical prophets rebuked kings. John the Baptist was martyred because he rebuked Herod (see **Matthew 14**). It is very important to take note of the fact that though there were prophets in the Book of Acts, and though the key Biblical characters in Acts interacted with kings and rulers, they did not prophesy to them or rebuke them. They respectfully witnessed to them about the gospel. The only exception was Paul rebuking the high priest (apparently by mistake) and then immediately apologizing for doing so (**Acts 23:3-5**). Nowhere in the New Testament do we see prophets who pronounce judgement on civil authorities until we get to the Book of Revelation. On the contrary, Paul instructs all Christians to submit to the civil authorities (**Romans 13:1-4**). At the time Paul wrote this passage, the wicked Nero was emperor in Rome. No prophet was sent to Rome to rebuke him.

What is interesting about how the Book of Matthew treats the issue of the "Elijah" of Malachi is that Jesus says two seemingly conflicting things about him: 1) that he did come in the person of John the Baptist who came in the spirit of Elijah (**Matthew 11:14; 17:12**) and 2) that Elijah will come (**Matthew 17:11**). If John the Baptist is the Elijah who came to announce the first advent of Messiah, who is, "*Elijah [who] is coming and will restore all things*"? While the answer to this is not universally agreed upon, many of us who believe in a literal future fulfillment of the events in the Book of Revelation point to the two witness (**Revelation 11:3-11**). One compelling reason for this is their similarity to John the Baptist's role. John the Baptist came to announce the imminence of the first advent, the witnesses come to prepare for imminent second advent. John pronounced judgement and salvation, the witnesses do the same. The other reason for taking **Matthew 17:11** this way is that other approaches to the passage have no real person(s) of whom to point.

### ELIJAH WHO WILL COME

**Revelation 11:3** says: "And I will grant

*authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.*" The ministry of the two witnesses will last for one half of the great tribulation. Sackcloth in the Bible is symbolic of mourning and repentance. These witnesses are agents of God's judgement on the pagan world system (see **Revelation 11:5,6**). Bringing judgement upon pagans is reminiscent of Elijah and the prophets of Baal (see **1Kings 18**). Consider this passage: "*Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord*" (**Malachi 4:5**). The great and terrible day of the Lord signified God's coming to pour out His wrath upon the wicked. The righteous in Israel longed for that day, often crying out "how long" (**Psalms 13:1; Psalm 89:46; Psalm 94:3; and Revelation 6:10**). The Messianic hope of Israel was a hope that included vindication of her desire for God's day of wrath upon His enemies. Jeremiah prophesied: "*For that day belongs to the Lord God of hosts, A day of vengeance, so as to avenge Himself on His foes; And the sword will devour and be satiated And drink its fill of their blood; For there will be a slaughter for the Lord God of hosts, In the land of the north by the river Euphrates*" (**Jeremiah 46:10**).

That no such day of wrath occurred during the first advent was one of the reasons many Jews were scandalized by Messiah. They were looking for a conquering king who would destroy Israel's enemies and establish the kingdom of David. In many Jewish minds, that Jesus died a cursed death on a cross was reason to not believe He was the Messiah. Similarly, Jesus' identification of John the Baptist with the "Elijah" who would come was problematic for many Jews. "Elijah" was to come "before the great and terrible day of the Lord." John the Baptist was killed by an enemy of righteousness, so how could he be the agent of God's judgement? We know that the solution to the first problem is that there are two advents, the first where Messiah deals with the sin problem, as the suffering Servant as prophesied in **Isaiah 53**, and a second advent where He comes in wrath and judge-

ment as prophesied in many other Old Testament passages such as found in the book of Joel.

Similarly, the coming of "Elijah" happens in two stages, both related to the first and second advents of our Lord. John the Baptist came as the messenger who prepares the way: "*This is the one about whom it is written, 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You'*" (**Matthew 11:10**). This is a citation of **Malachi 3:1** which concerned the Lord coming to His temple. The passage in **Malachi 4** about Elijah is about the Day of God's wrath upon His enemies. This is a different role. It shall be fulfilled just before the great outpouring of God's wrath at the end of the Great Tribulation. I believe that the two witnesses fulfill this role. Like Elijah of old they "*shut up the sky, that rain may not fall*" (**Revelation 11:6**). Remember that Jesus told us that Elijah already came and yet would still come (**Matthew 17:11,12**). Some may object that Elijah is one person, yet there are two witnesses. Since John the Baptist was not literally Elijah, but came in the spirit of Elijah, it is not necessary that the literal Elijah come to fulfill the future role either. The witnesses can and will fulfill this role in the spirit of Elijah.

### THE TIME BETWEEN THE TWO COMINGS OF ELIJAH

Between John the Baptist and the two witnesses in **Revelation 11** there are no prophets to nations. The reason is that from the Day of Pentecost until the final outpouring of God's wrath, the role of every person of God is to witness to the saving power of God revealed through the cross. Prophets that God gives to the church are for the church, not the nations (see **Ephesians 4:11-14** and CIC Issue 66). The church's role is to fulfill the Great Commission.

For example consider the only named prophet in the Book of Acts. "*And one of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius*" (**Acts 11:28**).

On the surface this sounds much like the prophets of old and the witnesses of **Revelation 11**. However, there are some major differences that reveal a different role. The Old Testament type prophets announced famines and other calamities as judgement upon nations. The judgement was sent from God because of certain behavior (usually idolatry) that demanded repentance. In this passage in **Acts 11** there is no indication that the famine was a judgement from God sent as punishment; it is merely stated as fact. The Romans were always idolaters, but this fact is not mentioned in **Acts 11** so there is no textual reason to see a cause and effect relationship. The action that the church took in response to Agabus' prediction is informative: "And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders" (**Acts 11:29,30**). Since the "brethren" in Judea were under Jewish persecution, they would be particularly unable to find the resources to survive the famine. The church took action to help others in the church. No king was rebuked nor judgement from God threatened. Please take note that what Agabus predicted **did** come to pass. Those who claim to be prophets today who make **false** predictions should take no comfort from the story of Agabus.

The other incident in Acts that involved Agabus is the story in **Acts 21:10-14** where he predicted Paul's arrest in Jerusalem. The prediction caused many Christians to beg Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Paul's response: "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (**Acts 21:13**). This prediction did not involve prophesying to nations, announcing judgement, or rebuking kings. It had to do with the church and Paul's ministry. It is interesting that Paul was determined to go no matter what happened to him. Evidently Agabus' prediction was given so that Paul would be prepared for what would happen, knowing that

God's purposes were at work. It was not given to stop Paul from going. The Christian witness that Paul was to bear before kings and rulers was of utmost importance.

Neither Agabus nor anyone else who ministered from the Day of Pentecost claimed the role of an Old Testament "prophet to nations." Paul's writings contain predictions of future judgement, but they will not come until the end of the age. The coming judgement is often called "The Day of the Lord" in the Bible. Here is what Paul said about it: "For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night" (**1Thessalonians 5:2**). At some future unknown time, the day of the outpouring of God's wrath will come. Until that unknown day, the role of the church is to witness to the power of God through the cross to save from their sins all who believe. The message of the cross is central.

What about the wicked world rulers? As I mentioned before, Paul wrote to the Roman Christians telling them to submit to these authorities because they were ordained by God. "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves" (**Romans 13:1,2**). John the Baptist rebuked one of the Herods; the Apostle Paul told Christians to submit to authorities. The difference is that John the Baptist was the last Old Testament prophet. Paul lived during the church age. When Paul was brought before kings he shared the gospel (see several such incidents in **Acts 22 - 26**). He was living after the Day of Pentecost and before the day of God's wrath.

#### HE WHO PROPHESES

There are other un-named "prophets" in the New Testament. Besides several mentioned in the Book of Acts, there are those discussed in **1Corinthians 14**. However, it must be pointed out that every time the noun "prophet" is used in the New Testament it is not always referring to a prophet such as Agabus or "prophets" such as those listed with apostles in **Ephesians 4**. It is also used in a functional sense meaning "one who prophesies." It is used in this way in **1Corinthians 14:29,32**.<sup>3</sup>

The "prophets" of **1Corinthians 14** are any members of a congregation who might prophecy.<sup>4</sup> Paul wrote, "Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy" (**1Corinthians 14:1**). This was written to the entire congregation. The content of such prophecy was not predictions of the future, the calling down of judgement upon nations, or rebuking kings. Paul says, "But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation" (**1Corinthians 14:3**). In several verses in this chapter Paul holds out the possibility of any member of the

congregation prophesying (**vss 5, 24, 31**). Such prophesying is to bring about the edification of the church. In this context we find the term "prophet": "And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment" (**1Corinthians 14:29**). These "prophets" are anyone in the congregation who gives a prophecy. Two verses later Paul writes, "For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted" (**1Corinthians 14:31**). The reason for judging is that there is no certainty that everything put forth in the congregation as prophecy is from God, truthful, or edifying.

Therefore, neither those who are classed as "prophets" along side of apostles in **Ephesians 4** nor those who are merely "ones who prophesy" in a lesser sense fulfill the role of Old Testament prophets who rebuke kings, prophecy

to nations, and call down God's judgment. Prophets and prophecy in the New Testament are for the benefit of the church, and do not serve as God's agents of judgement upon nations until the Great Tribulation when the two witnesses are raised up.

### MODERN "PROPHETS"

There are, however, many today who claim to be prophets to nations in the mold of those of the Old Testament. Since September 11th they have been in full gear, spouting forth threats of imminent vengeance upon America. Amazingly, several are claiming to have predicted the tragedy of the World Trade towers. It is interesting to me that no one seems to have been aware of these predictions until after the fact. If these prophets actually knew that the Trade Towers were coming down on September 11th, then they were surely lacking common human compassion in that they failed to warn the people who went to work there that day! The fact is none of the supposed prophets knew this was going to happen.

Of course the prophets of doom who have been churning out their predictions for decades eventually will claim to be right. This is certain since eventually bad things happen on the face of the Earth. The more specific they are the more certain that they will be wrong. Since I have been a Christian (I was born again in July of 1971) I have personally heard either first hand or on tape the following predictions from "prophets": that most of Florida would be submerged in the Atlantic, that the Aswan Dam would break in 1977, that Russian would invade Germany in the late 1970's, that the 1980's would be the greatest decade of evangelism in the history of the church, that in 1984 there would be a most horrific event in America, that the year 2000 would be catastrophic, that Los Angeles would fall into the Pacific Ocean, that there would be such a huge earthquake in the Midwest that Chicago would be destroyed and the Mississippi River would be ten miles wide, and others.

The thing that is most amazing

about all this is that those who give the most outrageously false prophecies have the biggest followings! In our day being a false prophet seems to be the sure road to success. This is why we need to go back to the New Testament to see what is said about prophets and prophecies. If I am right that John the Baptist is the last Old Testament prophet and that there will be no "prophets to nations" until the two witnesses, then all these people going around the world trying to fulfill such a role are on a fools' mission. They may sincerely **think** God called them to be prophets, but they cannot possibly fulfill such a role if it does not exist. Thus they fail.

### PROBLEMS WITH MODERN PROPHETS

In the Old Testament, if a person gave a false prophecy, that person was a false prophet. One strike and you were out:

*But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And you may say in your heart, "How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken" When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him (Deuteronomy 18:20-22).*

Modern prophets claim to be under a different standard. Their proof text is **1Corinthians 14:29** quoted above. In this text, since it says that the others "judge," it is assumed that prophecies are "mixed," and not always completely true. They are making several mistakes: 1) the "prophets" of **1Corinthians 14** are merely "ones prophesying" as I showed earlier, 2) the prophecies are not predictive prophecies, nor rebukes to kings or nations, but messages of encouragement or edification, and 3) the fact that judgement or "discernment" should be used by the body means that anyone giving a prophecy

does not thereby become independently authoritative. It does not imply that true prophets make false predictions and continue to be considered true prophets. The "others" who judge are members of the congregation, not other prophets as some have erroneously suggested.<sup>5</sup>

There is not a little irony here. Modern prophets cast themselves in the role of Old Testament prophets, with all the attendant privileges and status. Yet when it comes time to be judged, they reject the Old Testament standards and appeal to New Testament passages that do not refer at all to such prophets. There were good reasons for the Old Testament standards. The stakes were high. The destiny of nations, the authority of God's word, and the future history of Israel and her Messiah were at stake. If false prophets were taken as true the whole revelation of God's purposes would be polluted. For that reason, not only did their predictions have to be true; but they also had to give true teaching about God. Consider this passage:

*If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, "Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them," you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deuteronomy 13:1-3)*

Even if the sign comes to pass, those with false teaching about God and how He must be worshiped are to be rejected as false.

We have had some recent examples. Let me share some of these. One pastor told me personally about visiting a famous prophet in Kansas City. Upon meeting the man, he had the pastor hold up his hand. The prophet, not knowing anything about this person, saw colors radiating from the man's fingers and figured out by these what

ministry he had. I asked the man, "what did you find out?" He said, "the prophet told me I was a pastor." I said, "you already knew that and besides that is aura reading, which is occult." His response was that methods are neutral and the fact that the prophet knew by these radiating colors that he was a pastor proved he was a true prophet. This is an example of a false prophet wiggling out of the requirements of God's Word. Methods are **not** neutral. The Bible forbids many methods such as augury, divination, astrology, necromancy, and others (see **Deuteronomy 18:9-13**).

Another prophet came to town who was noted for his defective Christology and inability to articulate the doctrines of the faith in any lucid manner. His defenders claimed that we should not judge him by his teachings, since prophets are not teachers.

Another prophet gave a false prophecy in a church which a friend of mine had been attending.<sup>6</sup> He prophesied that it would not rain in that particular town until the town repented. Shortly there after they were inundated in rain and there was no evidence of repentance. That prophet came back to town later to preach on something else, apparently unabashed by his failures.

The sorry story that emerges is this: modern prophets can give false prophecies, give false teachings, use occult techniques, and yet still be considered true prophets! Even more so, they claim to be prophets like those in the Old Testament but yet look to New Testament passages that have nothing to do with such prophets to justify their error. The fact is that the Bible predicts

that false prophets will arise at the end of the age: "*For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect*" (**Matthew 24:24**). They are here and can be seen regularly on "Christian" TV and at "prophetic" conferences.

### CONCLUSION

The solution to this problem is to understand that there are now no prophets to nations. The purpose of the church is to preach the Gospel to all, maintain our witness and confession of Christ in a hostile world, and submit to the governing authorities as Paul taught in **Romans 13**. John the Baptist rebuked a king; he was the last Old Testament prophet. Paul witnessed to kings about the saving power of Jesus Christ. God will indeed send prophets to pronounce the judgement of God on this wicked world, but not until His time. Those prophets will be the two witnesses in the book of Revelation. There is no authoritative, infallible, normative revelation being given to the church beyond the canon of the Scripture. Jesus told us, "*But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance*" (**Mark 13:23**). What He told us is contained in the Scriptures. He did not say that prophets would tell us what we need to know at some later date in history. In the verse previous to this (**Mark 13:22**) Jesus warned about **false** prophets. So the truth has been told us in advance in God's Word. Lies, falsehood and error are disseminated by later day prophets who Jesus predicted would arise. They are here, right now,

and are spreading their deception. Do not listen to them.

### END NOTES

1. R. C. Sproul, *Dust to Glory*; [Video Tape Series] Vol. 7, Chapter 32, "*John the Baptist*" (Ligonier Ministries: Orlando, Florida).
2. Craig L. Blomberg "*Matthew*" in *New American Commentary*, (Broadman: Nashville, 1992) 186, writes: "Moreover, John was not just any prophet but the last in a series of prophets who prepared the way for Messiah and brought the old covenant era to its culmination."
3. Gordon D. Fee; *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* in NICNT; (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1987) 694,695; "The noun 'prophets' therefore, is to be understood as functional language, . . . and means, as in v. 3, 'the one who is prophesying.'"
4. Ibid. 694.
5. Ibid. 694 Fee argues convincingly against that view in light of the fact that "all" may prophesy.
6. The church was in Princeton Minnesota.

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## The Pitfalls of False Prophets

BY BOB DEWAAAY

**O**n December 31st, 1997 a modern "prophet" by the name of Bob Jones said this:

I have been tellin' people for a year to get out of Los Angeles.

They tell me they are really brave out there. I am not that brave. Cause that bravery is against God. If I lived in Los Angeles I would get out. I am gonna tell you something. That earthquake is not the only thing you have to worry about in Los Angeles. I am not sure it will be first. In a vision I saw suit cases being smuggled in by terrorists,

into California. They had nuclear bombs in 'em.<sup>1</sup>

He goes on to predict the breaking of the Hoover dam and the west coast falling into the ocean. He emphasized that Christians must flee these areas. My question is, should they do so? There are other similar prophecies by others, some of which are making their way around the world via email.

There are a number of problems

with predictive prophecies such as this one. In the above article I dealt with Biblical issues, showing that there are no “prophets to nations” in the Old Testament sense. In this article I will deal with the practical problems created by extra-Biblical, predictive prophecies. Those prophecies are given as the Word of God to contemporary Christians, forcing their hearers to make difficult decisions with no basis for action.

### WHICH PROPHETS ARE WE TO HEED?

A huge problem is which prophet to believe. It is not as if there is a clearly designated prophet from God whose words are authoritative. There are many “prophets” clamoring for our attention and they often present different if not conflicting messages. For example, Bill Hamon (see CIC issue 66) claims to be a prophet and apostle and he is predicting a glorious near future in which, possibly in his lifetime, the church shall prevail over the nations.<sup>2</sup> Others prophesy apostasy and doom. There is no uniform message in this prophetic movement except that we need prophets and there are supposedly many legitimate ones around. How do we decide which ones to listen to?

Some propose signs and wonders as the criterion. The ones who do the most remarkable signs should be considered the true prophets. The problem with that is that the Bible predicts that **false** prophets will do signs and wonders (**Matthew 24:24; 2Thessalonians 2:9**) with the intention of deceiving the elect. Though there is a lot of talk about supernatural signs among the followers of modern prophets, the actual signs themselves in most cases are lacking or questionable. The most common one seen on “Christian” TV broadcasts is people falling over. Benny Hinn seems to be a master at that one. Whatever the cause of people falling over, which can be debated, it is hardly decisive. This happens regularly at various meetings and provides no help to the Christian who must decide which of the conflicting prophets are truly speaking for God. The same goes for claims of healings.

These men are all claiming such powers, so one can hardly determine if Bob Jones or Bill Hamon is right in their conflicting scenarios based on claims of healings.

Some use supposedly supernaturally gained information about people to prove their prophetic legitimacy. Is that decisive? I have a video tape of an expose done by a TV network in which they went with hidden cameras to a meeting like that. The evangelist and his wife mingled with the crowd that was coming into the meeting, listening, watching, etc. They even had plants in the public restrooms listening to conversations. The information was fed to the evangelist who later called out people in the crowd, asking if they knew him or if he knew them. When the answer was “no,” he proceeded to tell them things about themselves supposedly by supernatural revelation that he could not have known — such as names, what brand cigarettes they smoked, who they came with, etc. All of this information was gathered by very natural means before the meeting, therefore the whole thing was a scam. But even if some person did have actual supernatural information, that would still not prove the person to be truly from God. Occultists and psychics do the same.

There is no prophet today who can prove that he is **THE** true prophet from God based on signs and wonders. This much is clear. So this criterion does not help us.

Another proposal is the degree of accuracy of prophetic predictions. On the audio tape cited at the beginning of this article, Rick Joyner makes the claim that Bob Jones who predicts the imminent destruction of the West Coast of America is the most accurate of prophets alive today. First, is this true? How many Christians alive today have ever heard of Bob Jones, much less have valid information about what all he has predicted over the years and which of these things has come true? Very few if any. Am I to take the word of one “prophet” who proclaims another prophets accuracy as reason to accept what he says as the very word of God?

There are associations of prophets who endorse one another. This seems rather self-serving. Bill Hamon claims to be an apostle because “prophets” say he is. This proves nothing. These people’s authority only exists in the minds of their circles of followers, however large or small these circles may be.

The Bible tells us not to fear “prophets” who make false predictions (**Deuteronomy 18:22**). Fear is a favorite tool of those who presume to be God’s spokesmen. Fear of catastrophe, fear of being judged, fear of missing out some great “move of God,” fear of coming under a curse and many other fears motivate people to keep listening to modern prophets and keep funding them. The fact is we have no reason to fear them. They have no authority claiming to speak for God when they do so beyond the authority of Scripture.

Many of the supposed prophets allegorize scripture when they use it at all. Bob Jones, in the same message where he told people to leave Los Angeles, claimed that the white horse (**Revelation 6:2**) has been riding since 1975 and that it is heroin and crack cocaine.<sup>3</sup> There is no way to derive that information from **Revelation 6** by using any reasonable hermeneutic. It is pure subjective, personal speculation on Jones’ part and the Biblical reference lends no support to it. If we accept the authority of Scripture, then these prophets have no authority at all over us because their words have nothing to do with God’s infallible Word.

So, we have no way of knowing which of the many claimants are the true prophets. In any regard their words have no authority. None of them even claim to have been one hundred percent accurate, so they can not claim to be infallible spokesmen for God. When they speak they may or may not be speaking for God, and they may or may not be accurate in their predictions. The Bible cannot help us decide because they do not use the Bible in any literal way if they reference it at all. The Bible does not tell us such things as whether suitcase nuclear bombs are going to blow up the West Coast before or after the big earth quake drops it into

the sea. So those exploited Christians who listen to these prophets have an awful burden to bear.

### WHY THE PREDICTIONS OF FALSE PROPHETS ARE DAMAGING

There are many people who do take the predictions of modern prophets seriously. The problem is — how does one decide whether to take action? For example, consider Bob Jones' prediction about the destruction of Los Angeles and his command for Christians to leave there. Any Christian living in Los Angeles who believed Jones to be a prophet from God would face a very difficult decision. Does one quit a job (or ministry), sell a house, up root a family, give up a Christian witness in that community and leave because of such a prophetic warning? When making the decision, one has to decide if the prediction is accurate. Jones' claims to have made some accurate predictions in the past (only his closest followers who actually heard the predictions before the event know if this claim is true), but does not claim 100% accuracy. So Christians in Los Angeles know this — Los Angeles may or may not fall into the ocean anytime in their lifetime. This is a true statement. However, it is definitionally true and would have been true had no prophetic utterance ever been given. The prophecy did not change the fact that it might happen and it might not happen. The prophet says it will happen but the prophet has been wrong before and might be wrong now.

How do they know if Jones is right? The only way is to wait and see. If Los Angeles and the rest of the west coast is destroyed, then he was right. This still has added nothing to their knowledge base. Before Jones gave his prophecy, they would not know whether Los Angeles will fall into the ocean until after it either happens or does not happen. After Jones gave his prophecy we still will not know whether or not Los Angeles will fall into the ocean until it happens if it ever does. So, logically, they have gained nothing by hearing the prophecy except fear and consternation.

The added problem with all this is time frames. How long do they have to wait to decide whether Jones is wrong? Since the prophecy was given in 1998 and it has not happened, do they now decide he is wrong? The original message gave a nine month time frame and implied that these things would happen before the year 2000.<sup>4</sup> If this was intended, then Jones has already been proven wrong.

In many cases these prophets avoid saying when their predictions are supposed to come true. This creates another another dilemma — those who hear them have to wait and wait and wait, wondering when the catastrophe will come. They never know when they can quit worrying and fearing the sudden destruction. What if it does not happen for ten years, or for twenty, or for thirty? If it does not happen for seventy years, anyone who was old enough to hear and comprehend the prophesy will likely not be alive long enough to find out if it was true. Actually, if it doesn't happen anytime soon, what good was the prophecy?

The false prophets are full of caveats to get themselves off the hook. They claim that predictions are conditional, and that if nothing happened then enough people in Los Angeles evidently repented so it did not happen. God decided to delay things for some reason. They claim that they are not 100% accurate **yet** in their prophetic ministries because they are still learning and growing.

All of this does not erase one glaring fact — God is portrayed as a liar when someone claims to be speaking direct revelation from God, in His name, and what they say is false. False prophecy is damaging in many ways: lives are uprooted, fear instilled and God's name is blasphemed. This is very serious and it is disturbing how blithely some are willing to pronounce, "thus saith the Lord." People are looking to a man to be an infallible spokesman for God when only the inspired Scripture is inerrant and infallible.

### HEARING FROM GOD

For many, going to prophetic meetings

and conferences has kept them away from sitting under solid, exegetical Bible teaching because it has been put aside for the "new revelations" of man. This creates immature and unstable Christians. Sadly many are starving to death for solid Biblical teaching in churches claiming to be seeking a great "move of God." In the audio tape quoted in this article, Bob Jones talks about a hunger for God's Word, but he was not talking about Bible teaching. The hunger is for personal, subjective revelations.

People want to hear from God. To receive this in their churches they should demand verse by verse expository preaching that delves deeply into the text of the Bible, bringing it to bear on the lives of the hearers. Then they will have heard from God. Paul said, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1Corinthians 1:21). The message preached, as seen in the context, is the message of the cross.

It is saddening how the gospel is being set aside for the revelations of man. I recently spent an evening watching hours of video tapes of preachers on a new satellite network that beams "Christian" broadcasting to home dishes. I was appalled. I heard a preacher who was basically giving a motivational seminar on how to be successful in business. I heard two "prophetesses" who "bound" all the demons and sent them to the abyss, telling them not to come out again (oddly, they do that every week; it must not work). One person was selling holy water that would heal people from a well that God supposedly told him to dig. I heard the most pompous, arrogant preacher I have ever seen browbeating a huge church full of people and using himself as the ultimate model of a great man of God. I saw overly dressed, jeweled, and made up, men and women sitting on gold thrones claiming "unlimited" portions (evidently of money). I saw people being knocked over and left to lie on the floor as preachers strutted around, evidently gaining more credibility as the piles of

bodies deepened. What I did **not** hear was the gospel: nothing about God's grace, nothing about the substitutionary atonement, nothing about the resurrection of Christ, none of the topics that are found in **every** sermon recorded in the book of **Acts**.

Brothers and sisters, this is not revival, it is apostasy. The prophets are lying to us and refusing to do such a simple thing as preach about the love of God shown through the gospel: revealed through the cross, demonstrated by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and offered as a free gift that will bring salvation to those who believe. What a travesty that millions of dollars from Christian offerings goes to produce TV broadcasts that deceive people rather than preaching the simple gospel and teaching the Word of God. Paul wrote: "How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!'" (**Romans 10:14,15**). We need to send preachers of the gospel, not self-proclaimed prophets who apparently are so caught up in their own revelations that the "sure word of prophecy" (**2Peter 1:19** KJV) is laid aside.

#### CONCLUSION

What kind of prophet tells people to save themselves from an earthquake

that might happen but has not, but does not tell them how to be saved from eternal damnation? Furthermore, he tells Christians to leave their ministries and Christian witness in areas of the country where he thinks lives will be lost. Do not the people in Los Angeles all the more need to hear the gospel if they are potentially going to soon be headed into eternity, many with no knowledge of Christ? Nowhere in the Book of **Acts** did anything like this happen. When Paul was warned by a true prophet, Agabus, about what would happen to him if he went to Jerusalem, Paul determined all the more to go. Here is what happened: "And when we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, 'What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus'" (**Acts 21:12,13**). Nothing was more important than the witness of the Gospel. May God deliver us from the fear-instilling false prophets and instead grant that we hear preaching from God's inerrant Word that will instill godly reverence for Him and His truth.

#### END NOTES

1. Bob Jones, [Audio Tape] "Word for the Coming Days - Rick Joyner & Bob Jones"; this message was given on December 31st, 1997. On the tape there is a reference to "9 months" which gives the impression of a pre-

diction of the time. Jones and Joyner were openly rebuked for this prophecy and how they later handled it. See <http://www.harvestnet.org/index.html>. Choose the link to: **PROPHETIC MANDATE — LEVELS OF INTEGRITY, TRUTHFULNESS, AND RESPONSIBILITY**; Please note that this particular Bob Jones has no relationship to Bob Jones University.

2. Dr. Bill Hamon, *Apostles Prophets and the Coming Moves of God*, (Destiny Image: Shippensburg, 1997).
3. op. cit. Jones.
4. See a discussion on this at <http://www.harvestnet.org/index.html>; and the link to the "Prophetic Mandate" article. The authors of this article criticizing Jones and Joyner believe a time frame was included with the prophecy.



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